



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DISCUSSION.

RADICAL EMPIRICISM AS A LOGICAL METHOD.

In his recent articles in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, and elsewhere, Professor James has been developing a new view of the problems of logic, in the light of which he hopes to reinterpret, if not expunge, the difficulties of our present post-Kantian epistemology, as well as the so-called 'metaphysical puzzles' of absolute idealism. The essence of the new position, so far as I have been able to understand it, is the application to the problem of knowledge of a new method, called by Professor James 'radical empiricism.' By this method he trusts to give an account of knowledge without assuming the absolute criterion which has usually been regarded as a necessary part of the philosopher's equipment. Naturally, an attempt of this kind, to regard an old problem from a new standpoint, demands sooner or later a critical consideration of the new method, in order to evaluate the results which it may be reasonably expected to yield. It is certainly a postulate of the instrumental theory of knowledge, which Professor James embraces, that no scientific method can be absolute and presuppositionless; for every such method implies a definite point of view from which it systematizes experience and in the light of which the results obtained must be interpreted. Accordingly, a criticism of the presuppositions of radical empiricism is in line with Professor James's own views, and, in the interests of scientific clearness and accuracy, is a practical necessity if we are to understand the real meaning of the results obtained by its application to logical problems. The present discussion is an attempt to take such a critical view of radical empiricism.

Professor James's new method consists in asking of the logical categories the question: What are they known as? What are their 'cash-values' in terms of particular experience? Especial stress is laid upon the point that the experience must be particular.¹ Nothing is to be admitted as a fact except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. Everything real must be experienced, and every

¹ "The Pragmatic Method," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, Vol. I, pp. 673 ff. Reprinted with a few omissions from *The University Chronicle* of the University of California, September, 1898.

kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real.¹ Thus, for example, speaking of co-conscious transition, the relation subsisting between different experiences belonging to the same self, Professor James says: "Personal histories are processes of change in time, and *the change itself is one of the things immediately experienced.* 'Change' in this case means continuous as opposed to discontinuous transition. But continuous transition is one sort of a conjunctive relation; and to be a radical empiricist means to hold fast to this conjunctive relation of all others, for this is the strategic point, the position through which, if a hole be made, all the corruptions of dialectics and all the metaphysical fictions pour into our philosophy. The holding fast to this relation means taking it at its face value, neither less nor more; and to take it at its face value means first of all to take it just as we feel it, and not to confuse ourselves with abstract talk *about* it, involving words that drive us to invent secondary conceptions in order to neutralize their suggestions and to make our actual experience again seem rationally possible."² The method is avowedly a development of that introduced into philosophy by Locke and continued by Hume. It differs from the traditional English empiricism by being 'radical'; that is, by taking all experience as it comes, and thus establishing the empirical reality not only of separate and distinct ideas, but also of relations between ideas. The conjunctions of experience have equal empirical sanction with the disjunctions.

In inquiring into the validity of this method as a means of investigating logical problems, we must clear it at the very start from an ambiguity in which Professor James appears to involve it. The adoption or rejection of radical empiricism as a logical method has nothing whatever to do with the broader proposition that logic, like every other science, depends at every step upon human experience. No thinker now seriously doubts that every science, including logic and metaphysics, is endeavoring to systematize human experience from a particular point of view, or that the appeal of epistemology, like that of the other sciences, is always to experience and never to a transexperiential reality. Certainly no student who has mastered Kant and Hegel can be in doubt on this point, and, as a matter of fact, it is so well recognized on all hands that it can scarcely be said now to be a matter of serious philosophical discussion. In this sense, everybody is an empiricist, whether he maintain the position of

¹ "The Experience of Activity," *The Psychological Review*, Vol. XII, p. 3.

² "A World of Pure Experience, I," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 536. The italics are Professor James's.

transcendentalism or of phenomenalism.¹ This general appeal to experience is, of course, in the highest degree vague and ambiguous. If every science can be said to be empirical in this sense, plainly this form of empiricism offers small basis for the criticism of any particular science. Radical empiricism, therefore, must be regarded as a particular form of the appeal to experience, a definite attitude toward the concrete facts. That for purposes of criticism, at least, Professor James does not always distinguish radical empiricism from this more fundamental and generally accepted philosophical position, is shown by his wholesale ascription to his opponents of the *adaequatio intellectus et rei*,² and his apparent assumption that the Absolute of modern idealism is 'beyond' experience in the same sense as Kant's thing-in-itself.

If, then, radical empiricism be reduced to a single definite mode of invoking the aid of experience, it appears to mean the employment of introspection and the observation of individual human experiences in order to determine the structure and function of the cognitive processes. An appeal to concrete experience means always, for Professor James, 'what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient.'³ The logical relations are to be validated and justified by taking experience 'at its face value,' 'just as we feel it,' and not as we conceptualize it. Knowledge is a form of felt continuity between an idea and a percept,⁴ and truth is what the individual 'troweth' with the greatest amount of satisfaction.⁵ The self is the actually experienced transition from mental content to mental content, having as its nucleus the relatively constant organic sensations, besides breathing and intra-cephalic muscular adjustments.⁶ The logical category of consistency is the felt consistency among judgments, objects, and manners of reacting, in the mind, and is witnessed by the subjective feeling of intellectual satisfaction.⁷ The problem of the conterminousness of different minds means for Professor James the question: Is there an identical content (*e. g.*, perspective, color, space, etc.) which is really common to the two minds? Does pre-

¹ Cf. Professor J. E. Creighton's article on "The Standpoint of Experience" in THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vol. XII, pp. 593 ff.

² "Humanism and Truth," *Mind*, No. 52, pp. 462 ff.

³ "The Experience of Activity," *The Psychological Review*, Vol. XII, p. 3.

⁴ "A World of Pure Experience, I," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 538 ff.

⁵ "Humanism and Truth," *Mind*, No. 52, p. 471.

⁶ "Does Consciousness Exist?" *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 477 ff., especially p. 491; "A World of Pure Experience, I," *Ibid.*, pp. 535 ff.

⁷ "Humanism and Truth Once More," *Mind*, No. 54, p. 197.

cisely the same bit of pure experience figure in two different mental contexts?¹ In short, Professor James's inquiry seems to be precisely that of structural and functional psychology. The problem of his investigation is the discovery of the feelings of relation, etc., present in consciousness during the act of cognition, or the significance of these feelings for the mental and organic functions of the individual.

That this is really the meaning of radical empiricism is shown most clearly in Professor James's application of the method to the conception of activity.² After a summary of the account which descriptive psychology gives of the feelings of activity, he says: "The experimenter of such a situation [of activity] possesses all that the idea contains. . . . The word 'activity' has no content save these experiences of process, obstruction, striving, strain, or release, ultimate *qualia* as they are of the life given us to be known" (p. 6). "The *percipi* in these originals of experience is the *esse*; the curtain is the picture. If there is anything hiding in the background, it ought not to be called activity, but should get itself another name" (p. 7). "If there *be* real creative activities in being, radical empiricism must say, somewhere they must be immediately lived. Somewhere the *that* of efficacious causing and the *what* of it must be experienced in one, just as the what and that of 'cold' are experienced in one whenever a man has the sensation of cold here and now. . . . A philosophy of pure experience can consider the real causation as no other *nature* of thing than that which even in our most erroneous experiences appears to be at work. Exactly what appears there is what we *mean* by working, though we may later come to learn that working was not actually *there*. . . . To treat this off-hand as the bare surface of a world whose real causality is a more solid way of action hidden in the cubic depths, is for the more empirical way of thinking, only animism in another shape" (pp. 14 f.).

Understanding this as the definite meaning of radical empiricism, what can we say of its validity as an organon of logical method? Is it not, by its very presuppositions, both subjective and individual? The inquiry of structural psychology is obviously so. It starts with the assumption that all the data of experience can be regarded as the content of an individual consciousness. As such, it is an object of scientific investigation like objects in the physical world. The facts may be generalized and laws discovered, but the mental facts themselves can never by any possibility get an objective reference. The

¹ "A World of Pure Experience, II," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 564 ff.

² "The Experience of Activity," *The Psychological Review*, XII, pp. 1 ff.

assumptions of the method forever preclude such a possibility, though, of course, if any unique conscious process or combination of processes was found to be correlated with the fact of objective reference, this would be an object for investigation by structural psychology. Such a process, however, would not be one whit less subjective, less a fact solely of the individual mind, than any other process. The logical problem differs essentially from this. The criterion by which logic must judge its categories is not their presence or absence as data in the individual consciousness, but their efficiency as modes of rationalizing experience. The important fact for logic in regard to causality is not that it appears in consciousness as certain feelings of strain, or what not, but that it enables us to understand experience. In this sense activity means a vast deal more than the feelings by which the experiencer of an active situation is aware of it. It is not at all 'the feeling of activity' upon which logic insists, but the rational principle of explanation. A similar criticism must be passed upon Professor James's view of co-conscious transition, the relation which, he says, is the strategic point of radical empiricism. Consciousness, he holds, is a unity because it is felt as a continuous transition; its discrete parts are united by feelings of relation which bridge over the discreteness and which are empirically as real as any other datum of experience. But surely, as feelings, these co-conscious transitions have no more logical significance than any other feelings or sensations. They cannot be said to be in any sense organizing principles which bind together separate contents in a logical unity. Personal histories, it may be admitted, are 'processes of change in time' and this change is experienced, but these facts are of very small importance for logic. The important fact is not that mental events are temporally continuous and that experience is therefore one and indivisible, but that it is capable of indefinite organization by thought. Experience is not a unity because it flows along without interruptions, but because its parts may be made logically to imply each other.¹ It is clear, therefore, that the rejection of mental atomism does not enable psychology to deal with logical problems, since the fundamental assumption of psychology in regard to its data is such that, for it, these problems do not even exist.

Functional psychology, too, makes a similar methodological assumption. The functions which it investigates must belong to an individual organism in an environment. If it follow the common biological

¹The above criticism of this position is by no means a new one. Cf., for example, "Modern Psychology and Theories of Knowledge," by Professor J. E. Creighton, *THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW*, Vol. III, pp. 196 ff.

tendency, this will be the animal organism and the world of every-day experience. Or again, its functions may be attributed to a mind, and in this case the latter must be criticised and defined. In any case, however, functional psychology is as dependent upon the assumption of an individual organism to which its functions belong, as is physiology, and no generalization of its facts can give it a different point of view. It will observe the mode of operation of the individual mind and study the relation of its functions to each other and to the total organism, whatever nature that may be assumed to have. In this way it may study the cognitive functions, regarding them as possessions of the individual organism. It may give a definition of truth, so far as this is an individual possession, in terms of feelings and reactions. Such an investigation might lead to precisely the views which Professor James holds. From this point of view, truth might perhaps be defined as the position which is most satisfactory to each individual, or the belief on which he is willing to act. It does not follow, however, that such an account of knowledge speaks absolutely the last word, unless indeed it can be shown that there is no other light in which the cognitive functions can be viewed. This is a question which scarcely admits an abstract discussion and certainly cannot be proved by a criticism of epistemology from the psychological standpoint. It would be proved only if all the attempts of logic to develop a science of knowledge as such should turn out to be absolutely fruitless. If, as the majority of philosophical thinkers would certainly maintain, the rationalizing of experience requires a science which shall regard the cognitive functions as superindividual and as essentially in relation to a transsubjective reality, the results of functional psychology would in no way militate against this view. Each discipline is a useful way of looking at our experience in order to make it intelligible, and each has its peculiar problems with which the other is entirely unable to deal. The interests of both, and of clear thinking in general, demand that the two spheres be kept carefully separate.

The attempts of Professor James to formulate a philosophy of radical empiricism appear to me, therefore, as a confusion of two essentially different methods, and a criticism of his results, I believe, will bear out this view. For example, his view of the functional relation of the psychical and physical is quite obviously the product of his effort to make psychology do the work of logic and metaphysics. If we adopt the standpoint of personal experience, probably everyone would agree that the distinction between the physical and the psychical is a matter of the function which each performs in experience.

But to offer this, in turn, as Professor James does, as an explanation of the self, is plainly a logical circle. For of what, one must ask, are the categories functions? Undoubtedly it is quite justifiable to regard them as functions of the experience of an animal organism, provided one keeps the limitations of this assumption in view. This, however, is apparently not Professor James's assumption. The psychical and physical might also be regarded as functions of a transcendental ego, but this is certainly not his view, for the self is just the aggregate of concrete thoughts which function in the subjective context. And, surely, to call them functions of a chaotic pure experience is unintelligible. Professor James has clearly lost sight of the fact that his method necessarily limits him to personal and individual experience, and that consequently it is unable to offer an explanation of that experience from a more inclusive point of view.

The concept of pure experience seems to me to show the same fundamental confusion of psychology with epistemology. I do not refer here merely to the general vagueness which characterizes the account of pure experience. This may be a superficial matter, and I would not willingly split hairs or lay myself open to Professor James's strictures on the 'logic choppers' who have preceded me in the criticism of his theories. It may not be amiss, however, in order to explain a possible failure to grasp his real meaning, to point out that pure experience is by no means a definite conception. Sometimes it seems to be merely a genetic stage in the development of consciousness.¹ Surely, however, an archetypal consciousness in this sense, the form of mentality we might find reason to attribute to the infusoria, can have no direct bearing on logic, or even on the psychology of the adult human mind. Again, pure experience seems to mean the whole of present experience 'as it comes,' and this is supposed to be a 'plain unqualified actuality, a simple that,' uncontaminated by reflective thought.² Yet Professor James elsewhere acknowledges that only the new-born infant and adults in a state of semi-coma ever really experience so elementary a state of consciousness.³ In this latter view, therefore, pure experience seems to be one aspect of present experience abstracted from the concrete total, the 'proportional amount of sensation' which the elaborated experience still embodies, the *that-ness* of the experience.

This indefiniteness is not, however, the fundamental ambiguity

¹ "Humanism and Truth," *Mind*, No. 52, pp. 460 ff.

² "A World of Pure Experience, II," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 564.

³ "The Thing and its Relations," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 29.

which I wish especially to criticise. My point is rather that pure experience figures sometimes as a psychological content, having the necessarily subjective character of such a content, and again as a basis for objectively valid logical functions. On the one hand, pure experience is the product of introspection and observation of the individual experience. If the present experience of the reader or writer be stopped short and made the object of observation, it will be found to be such a pure experience. Again, when the problem is the conterminousness of different minds, Professor James seeks an identical content, a single bit of pure experience, which is common to both. Unless we assume such common mental contents, he argues, there is no reason for supposing the existence of any mind except my own. But this, again, is clearly another case of the logical circle which we have already pointed out in Professor James's treatment of the physical and the psychical. For, if we take Professor James literally and consider experience only 'as it comes,' it is clearly unmeaning to talk of mental content as common to more than one mind, for it always 'comes' only as the possession of some individual. If, however, we consider mental content not in its particularity, but in the highly abstract and conceptualized form of psychological elements, we may indeed speak of an experience as common to any number of minds, but, as Professor James himself is forced to conclude, this has nothing to do with the conterminousness of different minds. There is not necessarily an identity of psychic content, even in this abstract sense, in the case of two minds which know the same object. Clearly the conterminousness of different minds consists in community of meaning and identity of logical relation, not in the presence of the same sensations and feelings.¹

In the performance of its logical functions, pure experience appears in quite a different light. Ignoring the subjective and individual presupposition of his method, and starting from the supposed fact that the self-feelings (organic sensations, etc.) do not attach to experience in the character of an immediate datum, he proceeds to the position that pure experience is not an individual matter at all. "It is a *that*, an Absolute, a 'pure' experience on an enormous scale, undifferen-

¹ "A World of Pure Experience, II," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 564 ff. Professor James himself admits that no such common content exists except in the case of space. This exception, however, is clearly a confusion of psychological with mathematical space. This point has been amply shown by Dr. B. H. Bode, "'Pure Experience' and the External World," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 128 ff.

tiated and undifferentiable into thought and thing.”¹ Individual pure experiences are so many little absolutes. Time has no meaning for it and no question of its truth can be raised. It includes not only all actual experiences, but all possible experience.² It is a bare *X*, having no structure or only an unknowable one. This, of course, is the means by which Professor James makes the *salto mortale* from his subjective method to objectively valid cognitions. For the boast of humanism, that experience is self-containing and leans upon nothing,³ means really that it leans upon these absolute attributes of pure experience. Knowledge becomes real only when our idea has actually terminated in a percept, an immediate datum of pure experience. This bit of pure experience is a ‘little Absolute’ which does not depend in the least on our reflective thinking, for the categories by which we think are merely inherited habits; it is just *there*, a bare fact, and that is all we can say about it. But surely the fact that it is there, that it corroborates and continues our thought, means something in regard to the nature of pure experience. If, as Professor James says, ‘our knowledge is, for the most part, a speculative investment, though the universe seldom protests our drafts,’ surely this is just as little fortuitous as the same condition in the commercial world. Does it not argue a very definite structure in pure experience, and a structure which bears some assignable relation to the functions of human cognition? At any rate, it leaves the question open. Every question which transcendentalism asks regarding its Absolute is equally applicable to Professor James’s pure experience, considered as a logical assumption. And not only are they applicable; they are equally necessary. Radical empiricism neither answers them nor excuses logic from answering them.

The essential weakness of radical empiricism, then, is that it attempts to develop a logic and metaphysics from a point of view which entitles it only to a psychology. It continues not only the method but the vice of English empiricism. The present discussion is in no sense to be understood as a disparagement of the psychological method as such, which is unquestionably an indispensable way of looking at experience. Nor is it contended that there is any special set of mental functions which belongs to logic and lies outside the domain of psychology. Rather it may be said that, whenever knowledge is regarded

¹ “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 181.

² “Humanism and Truth,” *Mind*, No. 52, pp. 470 ff.

³ “The Essence of Humanism,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 114.

as an occurrence in an individual experience, the inquiry is psychological and not logical. The epistemological inquiry neglects precisely this aspect of knowledge. Its concern is with knowledge as such, considered as the process of organizing experience in general, and accordingly, from this point of view, it cannot regard knowledge as a psychological occurrence at all; the function of cognition is regarded as super-individual and as essentially in contact with a transsubjective reality. The point I would insist upon is that a psychological treatment of the subjective processes underlying cognition cannot by any possibility solve the problems which confront the science of logic. Nothing but confusion can follow a failure to keep clearly in mind this fundamental difference of problem and of point of view. The assumption of an Absolute in logic and its rejection in psychology involves no antinomy, for the two sciences have different problems and must make different methodological assumptions. Nor do I mean to assert that the two sciences are absolutely and eternally separate, in the sense that they must develop in complete isolation. As is always the case with allied disciplines, the investigations of the one will prove significant for the other. No doubt, therefore, the development of a thoroughgoing functional view in psychology may have important results for logic, though it is too early yet to foretell what changes in logical theory it may necessitate. On one point, however, we may rest with absolute assurance. The progress of the two sciences will not be in the direction of an indiscriminate application of their respective methods, or a confusion of the results we may reasonably expect to gain from each.

GEORGE H. SABINE.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY.